

WASHINGTON -- Volunteers spread over 241 sites in Maryland, Washington, Virginia and West Virginia collected more than 131 tons of garbage Saturday during the annual cleanup of typical and unusual trash from the Potomac River watershed.

By late afternoon, workers had filled hundreds upon hundreds of bags with trash as typical as beverage bottles and as unusual as tennis rackets, bowling balls, grocery carts, a washing machine and a wooden boat, according to the Alice Ferguson Foundation, which coordinated the 18th annual event.

Lined up, the bags of trash would stretch 3 1/2 miles, officials said.

The tonnage of trash was expected to continue to climb as the cleanup continued.

"People just thoughtlessly discard trash," said Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., who volunteered Saturday. "It washes into streams and storm sewers, and then into the Bay. Not only is it unsightly, but it undermines the ecology of the river and the Bay."

At Hoyer's site in Accokeek, Md., volunteers found plenty of trash in a small area.

"I bet you there were a couple hundred bags worth of trash, and that was in probably in a thousand feet of riverfront," he said. "It's amazing how we go to that same spot and continue to fill a large dumpster."

About 3,000 volunteers turned out for this year's effort, following up last year's cleanup when more than 217 tons of trash was removed.